



Chris Danou's Capitol Report
Technical Colleges Play Important Role in Wisconsin

As your State Representative, there are many, many issues that come across my desk every day. Even though there is a broad range of issues that relate to our community, region and state, there is one that I believe is so important because it will help us solve many other issues we face. That single and important issue is public education.

Last week, I wrote about the economic impacts of the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the counties I represent in the 92nd Assembly District. These counties include Buffalo, Jackson and Trempealeau, and it's quite clear that despite the UW being about 155 miles from my home in Trempealeau, there are positive and tangible impacts for our community. This truly is a critical piece of the educational structure in Wisconsin.

As a father with two sons, I often talk about the importance of having quality K-12 public education for the next generation. K-12 schools, much like the UW, UW-System and UW-Extension, have all received drastic budget cuts since the Governor and legislative Republicans took control of Wisconsin State Government on January 3, 2011. Despite the multi-billion dollar budget cuts and an antagonistic attitude toward public education in general, we continue to see impressive signs of success. Just a few weeks ago, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee became an R1 research institution, which ranks it as one of the best 115 research institutions in the nation. This is quite the accomplishment for our state to have two R1 public universities (one in Milwaukee and one in Madison) that will help regional and state economies develop and grow in the 21st century.

There is another element of public education that brings great pride to our community, region and state. Wisconsin Technical Colleges play just as important of a role in educating the next generation as K-12 education and the UW-System. In fact, there are 326,000 students enrolled in the Wisconsin Technical College System, which is the largest higher education system in Wisconsin.

According to information my office received, nearly 9 out of every 10 graduates live and work in Wisconsin. These graduates see immediate success in finding a job to utilize their skills and earn a livable wage. Close to 92% of graduates find employment within 6 months after graduating. These graduates earn a median salary of \$37,440 right out of college, with data showing salary growth increases 48% over five years. While \$37,440 is a great start, some degrees from Wisconsin technical colleges bring higher median wages, such as gas utility construction and service, power engineering, boiler operating and electrical distribution. No matter what a person's interest might be, there certainly are many areas of study one can pursue and then use the knowledge and skills learned to make a livable wage after college.

Just like with the UW-System and UW-Extension, there is an immediate payback for taxpayers. Wisconsin taxpayers receive \$12.20 in benefits for every dollar invested in the technical colleges. At least 54% of Wisconsin's jobs today require technical education and more than 30,000 students earned technical college credit while in high school. The sooner someone is earning a livable wage, the sooner they can start paying off debt and saving for the future, so these programs give students a head start and a leg up in their field and future career.

We truly have a lot to be proud of with all levels of public education in Wisconsin, but we know we have more work to do. For generations, Wisconsin was known to be a good place for people to get a quality education and have access to universities and technical colleges so they could pursue a passion and start a career after graduation. Unfortunately, the necessary money to appropriately fund things is being directed to other programs, like private charter and voucher school programs.

I hope we start making higher education a priority in our state so we can give the next generation a career, build a 21st century economy and keep Wisconsin moving forward.

